

*July 19 / Administration of William J. Clinton, 1994*

Now, I'm telling you I have pleaded for bipartisan cooperation in a lot of ways, but they want to go out and use that old tax and spend rhetoric. You just check your hip pocket, folks. It is time. America has got to lead the world into the 21st century. We have difficult challenges ahead. We've got a crime bill to pass here. We've got welfare reform to pass here. We have to come to grips with health care.

I just got back from a trip to Europe in which I had three large meetings with American service families, enthusiastic Americans serving our country overseas, willing to put their lives on the line for you. And do you know in all three meetings, those people only asked me about one issue, health care. They're afraid they're going to be sent home after serving our country abroad to a country in which they won't have health insurance for their children. They know we spend more on health care than anybody else in the world. We're the only country in the world that can't figure out what to do about it.

Now, Hawaii figured out what to do about it. They adopted the solution Secretary Bentsen's always advocating: let employers and employees split the burden, buy private insurance, cover everybody. In Hawaii insurance costs small business 30 percent less than it does in the rest of the country; everybody's covered; and people are healthier. We've got to do something about this, folks.

I went to the Governors' conference today and the Republican leader of the Senate was there, and he said he was willing to work all through August, which I took as a significant olive branch, and all through September and all through October. And I am too, all day and

all night long. But if we don't do something about this, what's going to happen to the Federal Government is we'll cut defense too much, we won't be able to invest what we ought in our children's future and our education and training and building the economy tomorrow. And being in the Senate and House is going to be a matter of writing checks for health care because that's the only thing that's going up. Everything else is going down—and not to buy new health care but just more for the same. We can't do it.

There may be other ideas than mine, but I'll tell you one thing: I hired on to solve problems. And I showed up for Richard Fisher tonight not because he will agree with me on every issue, he will disagree from time to time. He will vote for the people of Texas, not for me. But he will hire on to solve problems. He does not want to come up here and warm the seat or have empty rhetoric or just spout empty rhetoric. Public service should be about ideas and ideals and vision and what's good for ordinary people. That's how this country lasted 218 years.

And I believe he's got a chance to win that is better than average. And more importantly, I think he has that chance because he is right for the people of Texas, and that will be good for the United States of America. And I thank you for helping him.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:45 p.m. in the Chinese Room at the Mayflower Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Robert Strauss, former chairman, Democratic National Committee.

## Remarks and an Exchange With Reporters on Health Care Reform *July 20, 1994*

*The President.* Let me begin by thanking the Democratic leadership for coming today and saying we have a very active several weeks ahead of us in this session of Congress with action pending on health care, on the crime bill, on GATT, with bills pending on campaign finance reform and lobby reform and several other

things. We're going to have a lot of work on our hands.

I would like to restate a few things about health care in light of the meeting with the Governors yesterday. First of all, my goal is universal coverage. It is the only goal that works for ordinary Americans. I have always said, from the time I presented my bill, that I was flexible

on how to get universal coverage and would be willing to compromise on that. I was encouraged that the Senate Minority Leader said yesterday that he was willing to work every day in August, September, and October if necessary to get a good health care bill.

But let me make the main point I was trying to make yesterday. Whatever we do must work for ordinary Americans. We now have a lot of evidence that if we tinker around with the system and don't try to do something comprehensive, we could actually make it worse for ordinary Americans. We could increase the cost to middle class Americans and decrease coverage.

I am very encouraged that today the American Medical Association and the AARP, the American Association of Retired Persons, joined the AFL-CIO in coming out for universal coverage and shared responsibility between the employers and the employees. That's a very good sign that they have analyzed this in the same way that we have. And I hope it will contribute to the debate. I believe it will. They joined, as you know, the heads of virtually every medical school in America, the Nurses Association and other doctors' associations, thousands of small business people.

So, we have to do something that works. That's going to be my bottom line. Let's don't do something that won't work.

Q. Mr. President, the confusion seems to be over how you define universal coverage.

The President. I don't think that's right. The only definitional issues that arose in the Congress were definitional issues that some people around this table were involved in on the so-called trigger mechanism, what level of coverage that you're making progress for universal coverage would trigger further action and what wouldn't. That's something that will be up to the congressional people to work out.

The point I was trying to make yesterday is that we have no way of knowing, we have no evidence that there is any available and affordable way to get close to 100 percent of coverage without some sort of requirement that involves everybody paying. That's the point I was attempting to make yesterday, but I'm willing to listen if somebody's got another idea that will work. We mustn't do something that doesn't work.

We have this Catholic Health Association study which shows conclusively that if you just

try to do insurance reforms you could wind up with higher rates for middle class people at lower levels of coverage. That is the essence. But let's do something that works for ordinary Americans.

Q. But 95 percent would still leave millions of Americans uninsured, and don't you have the same problem then, if they are uninsured, that there will be the cost shifting that you—

The President. No one ever talked about a law. There's never been a suggestion that we have a law which would set that as a goal. That number only came up in the context of the so-called trigger bill. Nobody did that. And no one has yet found a way to do that without a law that says "universal coverage." The point I made yesterday is we have universal social security, but about 2 percent somehow don't get covered. We have universal school attendance laws in every State in the country, but there are always a couple of percent of the people that fall through the cracks. [*Inaudible*—write it into law to get this.

Q. Are you sorry—

The President. No. I'm sorry that after all my skills and efforts at communicating, the point I really made yesterday somehow didn't get through, which is that we now have the evidence of the States and another study which shows that the opposing bills, the alternative bills, will not work. That is the issue. We must do something that works.

Q. Are you considering working through August, September, October?

The Vice President. Why are you interested, Helen [Helen Thomas, United Press International]? [*Laughter*]

The President. Let me just say this. I'm sure—Senator Dole offered that yesterday, and I would gladly accept. Of course, I'm sure it's not just up to him and to me. But I think it's worth it for the American people to get a good health bill.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:20 a.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House, prior to a meeting with congressional leaders. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.